

Agricultural Burning Practices & Research Task Force #65 Meeting Summary

DATE: November 9, 2005

LOCATION: Washington State Dept. of Ecology, Eastern Regional Office, Spokane WA.

<u>Members Present</u>		<u>Representing</u>
Grant Pfeifer- Chair	Air Quality Program	Department of Ecology
Sverre Vedal	University of Washington	Public Health
Gretchen Borck	Washington Association of Wheat Growers	Agricultural Community
Michael Ingham	Alfalfa Seed Industry	Agricultural Community
Larry Cochran	WA. Assn. of Conservation Districts	Conservation Districts
Dave Lauer	Benton County Clean Air Authority	Eastern Washington Local Air Authorities
William Johnston	Washington State University	Academia, (Crop & Soil)
<u>Members Absent</u>		
Michael Bush	WSU Extension	Academia, (Tree Fruit)
John Cornwall	Grass Seed Industry	Grass Seed Industry
Bob Gore	WA Dept of Agriculture	WA Dept of Agriculture

Introductions, Announcements

The 65th Task force meeting was held at the Washington State Department of Ecology Eastern Regional Office in Spokane, Washington. The Agricultural Burning Practices and Research Task Force (Task Force) meeting began with the introduction of Task Force members and guests.

The November meeting is reserved for a report of the yearly agricultural burning program recap and a discussion about the previous year's burn season. The November meeting is also scheduled for scoping changes and discussion about Best Management Practices, (BMP's).

Before the recap and BMP discussion, a number of items were distributed. A matrix of burn days by type of burn day and county showed how many acres were burned in Columbia, Walla Walla, and Whitman counties in August, September, October, and the first week of November by burn day type. A listing of Agricultural Burning complaints listed each complaint about smoke received by Ecology in 2005, broken out by county.

Fall Burn Season 2005 Recap

Karen Wood, Department of Ecology, (Ecology), staff person from the Eastern Regional Office presented the fall, 2005 recap. During the summer, the "School" wild fire burned some acreage of wheat which may otherwise have requested burn permits. The most remarkable factors about the fall burn season for 2005 were the very late local burn bans present in some areas. In Columbia and Walla Walla counties, the burn bans were not lifted until October 3. October was very wet, so not all of the permitted burning was accomplished in those counties.

During the general discussion about the burn season, Mr. Ingham asked if the burning which had not yet been accomplished was due to the extended burn ban, or whether the expanded use of metering caused the backup. Ms. Wood said she believed the burn bans were a very important factor, and that Ecology is working with the fire districts in Walla Walla county to coordinate burning better in the future.

The complaint summary showed that there were approximately two agricultural burning complaints in each county where agricultural burning is prevalent in Eastern Washington. A new type of complaint was ash fallout, which is apparently common, but which was new to Ecology this year. Reports were received from Dayton and Walla Walla about ash fallout.

Dr. Vedal commented that there were virtually no complaints from Pullman or Spokane. Ms. Wood felt that the use of enhanced (metered) burn decisions as well as better public perception of smoke impacts both contributed to the lack of complaints from these areas.

Each of the items listed above was discussed by the Task Force. No resolutions were agreed upon or voted on by the Task Force. The public attending the meeting also participated in the discussions.

Fees, Research, and BMP's

Mr. Pfeifer gave the background on fees charged for agricultural burning permits. The fees were initially set at \$2.00 per acre and have never been adjusted. He handed out an analysis of the fee structure and Ecology's burn program costs. This document included the documentation of inflationary factors which have not been incorporated into the fee structure, and a comparison of the income from agricultural burning permits and the cost of the program, which is about ten times the income. Also presented was a summary of what other west coast states charge for agricultural burn permits. Based on the requirements that the fees should be used for research and to support the administration of the agricultural burning program, and that the maximum fee allowed under the law is \$2.50 per acre, Ecology initiated discussion of a potential fee increase of \$0.50/acre (from \$2.00 per acre to \$2.50 per acre). Ecology also asked that the Task Force consider adjusting fees for heavy or light residue levels. Orchard tear out debris would be an example of heavy debris, and pre-raked stubble would be an example of light debris.

Melissa McEachron, Ecology coordinator of the Agricultural Burn Rules Committee, told the Task Force members that Ecology had a goal to have a draft rule on Agricultural Burning Fees available by early December.

Mr. Pfeifer reminded the Task Force members that the breakdown of where the fees go once they are collected is up to the Task Force to determine. The Task Force discussed the distribution of these funds without coming to any conclusion, and expressed the need for input on orchard burning from the absent Michael Bush.

Ms. Wood talked to the Task Force about Best Management Practice (BMP) changes. Earlier this year, a Best Management Practice for cereal grains was put into place which forbade burning on ground where a crop will not be planted in the same season as the burn. At the time of the passage of this BMP, Ecology did not believe this to be a common practice. Ecology has come to learn that there are several growers in Whitman and Lincoln County that routinely burn in the fall for a spring planting. These growers chisel the stubble, burn what is left above ground, and then leave the ground fallow for the winter. This practice decreases the amount burned by burying some of the stubble, while at the same time the buried stubble provides structure to soil to prevent erosion over the winter. Some draft language revisions will be provided to the Task Force at the next meeting in February on addressing this practice as a BMP. Growers who use the practice and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) which opposes the practice will be invited to address the task force regarding this BMP.

The Task Force was given copies of a letter from Dr. Schillinger written in response to the Task Force's request for a preliminary report on the farm economic and production costs associated with the ongoing research project he is conducting, *Direct Seeding into Heavy Irrigated Stubble as an Alternative to Burning*. The Task Force voted unanimously, based on the contents of Dr. Schillinger's letter, to provide him with the second half of funding for the final year of the project.

All suggested changes to BMP's are to be distributed to Task Force members before the next meeting.